



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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North Dakota Observes World AIDS Day *Department of Health Urges Testing for At-Risk People*

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health is observing World AIDS Day December 1 by stressing the importance of testing for people at risk for HIV who do not know their status, according to Karin Mongeon, HIV/AIDS Program manager.

About 40,000 Americans become infected with the virus each year, and only 75 percent of those who are infected know it. In the first six months of 2004, nine newly diagnosed cases of HIV/AIDS were reported in North Dakota. Most of the cases were between the ages of 20 and 39 at the time of diagnosis.

“It is so important for those who are infected to know it,” Mongeon said. “Studies show that people who know their status, in most cases, take the steps necessary to avoid transmitting HIV to others.”

The Department of Health urges anyone who has ever put themselves at risk for HIV by engaging in risky behavior – such as unprotected sex or needle sharing for drug use, tattooing or body piercing – to get tested for HIV. HIV testing is available at test sites located throughout the state and staffed by trained personnel who offer free and confidential HIV testing and pre- and post-test counseling and referrals to those at risk for HIV.

According to Mongeon, several barriers keep people from getting tested. “Low perception of risk, fear, stigma and discrimination continue to pose major challenges for effective HIV/AIDS prevention and care,” Mongeon said. “Fear of discrimination may prevent people from getting tested or seeking treatment for HIV/AIDS. Ultimately, it can prevent them from being offered or seeking the treatment that could save their lives.”

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Visit the health department home page at www.ndhealth.gov.

This year's World AIDS Day theme, *Women, Girls, HIV and AIDS*, focuses on how the effects of HIV/AIDS have significantly increased among women. Women now make up half of all people living with HIV worldwide.

For information about HIV testing and other HIV/AIDS services, call the North Dakota Department of Health HIV/AIDS Program hotline at 800.70.NDHIV or visit the program's website at www.ndhiv.com.

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